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ABSTRACT

The main question discussed in this paper is whether the confrontations which have been taking place on college campuses these past few years provide the basis for a new consensus which will enable all to move forward with confidence and a renewed sense of achievement. In discussing these confrontations, however, several fallacies need to be dispelled: fallacy 1, disruptions typically occur at big, impersonal universities; fallacy 2, only a small percentage of students are involved; and fallacy 3, the Viet Nam war and the draft are basic causes of student unrest. The author feels that student radicals do not really wish to escape from authority, but rather that they badly need some authority which can be respected and in which they can place confidence. Young people also have a short time horizon, both looking backward and looking forward. They have a sense of urgency for the immediate as well as a growing disbelief in progress, or a growing disbelief in the gradual nature of progress. What is required from adults is neither indignant repression nor disgusted withdrawal, but constructive and patient efforts to respond on the campuses to the legitimate criticisms and to help restore an atmosphere in which there can be a more fully shared responsibility for the changes that need to be made. (KJ)

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CONFRONTATION--CATALYST FOR CONSENSUS

Vincent M. Barnett, Jr.

Address delivered at the 21st Annual Meeting of the ACUHO, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts

July 28, 1969

I consider it a disturbing privilege to be making the keynote address at the 21st annual meeting of your organization. It is a privilege because any speaker would welcome the opportunity to address such a distinguished group from campuses all over the country. It is disturbing only because I feel the severe constraints of both time and talents at my disposal in attacking a profoundly important and complex subject.

Can the confrontations which have been taking place on college campuses these past few years provide the basis for a new consensus which will enable all of us to move forward with confidence and a renewed sense of achievement? I take it that is the central question this conference is met to discuss and upon which, if I perform my function, I am supposed to cast some light. Certainly some new consensus is needed if these institutions are to continue to function essentially as free and open societies where reason prevails and force is characteristically out of place. Just as certainly, the events of recent years have shattered the old consensus; polarized students, faculty, alumni, and friends; and shaken our faith in the strength of a community based on reason and peaceful persuasion. So the question of whether a new consensus can emerge is not only an important one, it is also a very real and a very present one.

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Now, of course, you do not expect me to say no to that question. And I shall, at least on this point, live up to your expectations. I have no doubt that such a consensus will emerge, and with it organizational changes and established practices which will once again make it possible for the educational enterprise to go forward in relative peace and freedom from threats of force and violence -- though not, I

think, in isolation and unconcern for the major problems of our society. The real question is not whether, but how soon, and at what cost in disruption, strain, mutual recrimination, and even bloodshed.

Being essentially a professorial type, even though having undergone a temporary aberration as a college president, I am convinced that we cannot build that new consensus until we have a moderately good understanding of the reasons for the break-up of the old. And I am equally convinced that we are only now beginning to approach that kind of understanding. The old sense of community will not be re-established either by nostalgic wishfulness or by force. The new sense of community will be achieved only after we seek vigorously to understand the breakdown of the old and to move forward constructively on the basis of that understanding.

This is a very complex subject, and one which is getting an increased flood of attention from writers, journalists, educators, psychologists, and others with varying degrees of acquaintance with the realities of campus life today. In my view, much of what is being written and said is not very perceptive and is considerably less than helpful. I therefore have an obligation to give you some of my insights into the nature of the so-called activist movement on college campuses and of the reasons for the widespread response it has found, at least insofar as a professor and former college president can claim to have any such insights. In addition to these dubious credentials, however, I am also the father of five children, three of whom have gone through college in recent years and two of whom are on the verge of that enterprise. While I am by no means certain that I fully understand all that is happening, and while I am convinced that the particular situation varies widely from campus to campus, I am bold enough to offer some hard-earned generalizations.

Aristotle, a long time ago, pointed out that one way to define something is to specify clearly what it is not. I think this bit of wisdom is peculiarly relevant to our subject today. All of us, when faced with disturbing and shattering events, try to find some explanation which will fit them into a familiar pattern. This helps

us conclude that the discordant phenomenon is really only a slight variant of something we already know and understand. This is comforting. It can also be dangerously misleading.

As I have gone about the country in the last two or three years talking to various groups of alumni, businessmen, college administrators, parents, and other interested and worried people, I have discovered in the many puzzled and tentatively hopeful questions asked me precisely this tendency to cling tenaciously to comforting but only marginally significant explanations of these events. To the rather hopeful questions as to whether campus disorders were not really attributable to this or that somewhat simplistic cause, I have had to say no. I have had to say that the situation is considerably more complex and the causes more fundamental than my questioner is suggesting.

These questions have tended to form such a characteristic and predictable pattern that I have made my own little list. I have come to think of them as the fallacies, or misconceptions, or half-truths, or mini-truths, which abound with respect to college disorders. In the Aristotelian spirit of defining by excluding, let me offer you a few of these fallacies which, taken by themselves, do not explain all or even perhaps very many campus uprisings.

Fallacy Number 1: Student disorders typically occur at big, impersonal universities -- where undergraduates are ignored, professors spend most of their time off campus, administrative officers are unresponsive, and students are treated as IBM cards.

Fallacy Number 2: Only a small percentage of students are involved -- on the order of one or two percent.

Fallacy Number 3: The disruptions are the work of professional or semi-professional outside agitators.

Fallacy Number 4: The disorders arise because of reactionary administrations which ignore and repress the students.

Fallacy Number 5: A major cause is the excessive time and money spent by the institutions on defense contracts, classified research, ROTC, and various other service functions for the "military-industrial establishment."

Fallacy Number 6: The Viet Nam war and the draft are the basic causes of student unrest.

Fallacy Number 7: Most of the students in the crowd are just curious onlookers and hangers-on, seeking the excitement that used to be provided by such outlets as goldfish-swallowing and panty-raids.

Fallacy Number 8: Disorders escalate because Presidents hesitate to "crack down" by calling in the forces of law and order -- because "weak administrations" fail to "nip them in the bud."

I have some others on my private list, but these will suffice. I shall not take the time now to comment on each of them. I shall only point out that for almost all of them almost any of us could name institutions which have suffered substantial disorders despite the fact these explanations are simply inapplicable to them. These are non-truths or part-truths which, if uncritically accepted, actually impede the process of coming to the broader and more perceptive understanding necessary if we are to respond effectively.

What, then, <u>does</u> help explain the current crisis on our campuses?

I suspect that some of what I have to say may appear to be a defense of student activism, at least in the minds of those who think that it is wholly irresponsible, deplorable, and without justification. Let me state as clearly as I can at the very beginning that I do not condone the use of force, violence, ultimata, threats, and physical disruption of the campus for any ends whatever, no matter how good they may seem or how good they may in fact be. Partly, this is because I deplore the use of such means in any form to settle any conflicts, although I recognize that in an

imperfect world there are situations in which the pursuit of transcendent goals may justify the resort to force and violence. But even if there are such situations in the world at large, I deplore the use of these methods in an educational institution, however desirable the goals may be, precisely because it is in educational institutions that reason and discussion and rational accommodation of conflicting views are the essence of the spirit of the enterprise. Indeed, the university may be one of the few remaining places in our society and in our world where reason may be expected to prevail, and the disappearance of that possibility in our institutions of higher learning would be a tragedy for us and for the world.

What I am about to say, therefore, should not be read as a defense of the more extreme forms of student activism but should be accepted as an effort to help in the understanding of the elements that go into the broad variety of student efforts to reform and remake their institutions and their society.

First of all, of course, it becomes quickly important to define more precisely what it is we are talking about -- what we mean by student activism. It is not without some irony that it is only a few short years since the characteristic criticism of the college generation was that it was apathetic and passive in its acceptance of the shortcomings of college life and the ills of society in general. Perhaps the most important thing to be said on the subject in broad terms is that we should be grateful that this is no longer the case. No matter how distasteful specific manifestations may be, and no matter how undesirable the peaks of activity that may be reached in certain places or in certain times, I suggest that we must all be happy that the members of the younger generation are taking an intense and serious interest in the world around them and feel an obligation to make it a better world.

We must at once distinguish among certain kinds of student activism. Many college presidents, deans, journalists, social psychologists and others have tried to classify and describe the structure of campus activism. Some observers have spoken of it as a series of concentric circles; to others the symbol of the onion is

more descriptive. In any case, it is useful to distinguish among several different kinds of groups which may respond in different ways to different issues on different campuses. At the center of the onion, or in the innermost of the concentric circles, there is in many cases a so-called hard core of student activists who are convinced that all of the institutions of this society are corrupt, that the college or university is simply a venal handmaiden of a corrupt society, that there is no hope to be sought in the gradual improvement of those institutions, and that the only prospect of progress is to bring the existing society to an end abruptly and, if necessary, violently, so that we may start again to build a better world. These are typically a very small minority of the students and would be comparable to the radical proportions of student bodies in the past except that they have no discernible plans of their own for the rebuilding of society after the destruction of the present one.

In that sense, therefore, they cannot be compared to the radical, communist, socialist groups of earlier years. They reject orthodox communism with as much scorn as they lavish upon capitalist institutions.

Around them in the next layer of the onion is a substantially larger group of students, deeply convinced of the necessity for social, educational and political reform of existing institutions and willing to accept the proposition that such reform cannot be brought about effectively by normal political and institutional processes. These are the students who are prepared to say on a particular issue that the resort to confrontation and force is justified, not as a means of destroying society or of destroying the university but as a means of improving both. When told that such improvements could be brought about through the orderly processes of these existing institutions, they are skeptical and can be persuaded by their more activist colleagues that no substantial change is likely to be achieved in this way -- that appearances might change, that vocabulary might change, but that real change is unlikely. This is the group which will respond to a particular issue with a willing-

ness to resort to tactics which they would not wish to generalize and for a goal which is achievable within the framework of present institutions.

Around this group is a still larger group, and cumulatively probably a substantial majority of students, which is neither activist in the violent sense nor even zealously reformist but is subject to a mood that pervades large numbers on the campuses and in the present younger generation -- a mood which is characterized by many attitudes that make it possible for the more radical groups to mobilize substantial portions of this group on particular issues. I wish to come back to the mood of the younger generation a little later.

There are two or three other smaller groups which should be added to make the picture at all descriptive. There is still a group of students at all colleges, larger at some than at others, which does not wish to get involved seriously with any such questions and which regards itself as being at college for an education, or for fun, or for athletics, or for some other personal objective not related to the broad issues of social policy. This group, which a few years ago was typically a very large majority of the college generation, may now be the minority on a number of campuses. It is the group that will likely grow in size as the present peak of campus unrest diminishes, but at present it is not safe to assume that it is the typical college group on many campuses.

Another specific group which must be added on many campuses is the Black Student Union group, although it bears different names on different campuses. While the internal tensions of such groups are greater than is generally recognized, and while black nationalism compounds their problems, they tend to align themselves ideologically more with the inner core of radical and zealously reformist students than elsewhere in the spectrum. There is no automatic unity of objectives between the black and white students, but there are a number of issues being pushed by black students which may mobilize wide support among the radical white students and also among the reformists and the other groups.

Let me return now to the question of why the most active of student radicals have been successful in mobilizing widespread support on a number of college campuses. I think the answer is to be found in the general mood of the college age generation, and I should like briefly to set forth what appear to me to be some elements of that general mood.

In the first place, it is possible to interpret almost all of this as a general reaction against authority and to argue about Dr. Spock, permissive parents, broken families, and the like. My own interpretation of what is really at the heart of the seeming revolt against the establishment and enmity toward the concept of authority is that it is not what it appears to be. I could very well be wrong, but my assessment of the way this generation feels is that it does not really wish to escape from authority but that it very badly needs some authority which it can respect and in which it can place confidence. In this sense the real problem is not that the college age generation questions the need for authority, but that it questions the legitimacy of the present institutions which seek to exercise such authority. That legitimacy is questioned primarily on the grounds of hypocrisy, of easy verbal acceptance of goals which no one really wishes to achieve, and therefore of the forfeiture of any right to respect or loyalty on the part of the young. This is a serious, and of course not wholly unjustifiable, charge.

A second element of the general mood, in my opinion, is the fact that young people these days have a strikingly short time-horizon, both looking backward and looking forward. Anything that has happened very much earlier than now is irrelevant and anything that might be expected to happen at some distant time in the future is likewise held to be irrelevant. One of their young prophets has said, "Try not to think more than a couple of days ahead." Some one has called this the "Now Generation," and this is a very distinctive element of the mood. Some will say that is always true of youth, that it values the present and undervalues both the past and the future. I myself perceive a somewhat more desperate feeling of this kind than I

think would have been true before the world had the technological capacity to destroy itself overnight.

A third element in the mood is that of frustration, and here I must mention again that this frustration, to a very large degree, arises from a discrepancy between professed goals and observable reality. It is here that the disappointment and impatience with our civilization's performance, with its dangerous underachievement of its professed goals of world peace and racial equality, seem most compelling. If the Vietnam war were to be settled soon and if dramatic progress were to be made in the resolution of our racial problems, I think great strides could be made in diminishing the sense of frustration of these young people. I do not believe that such events would mean the end of student activism, although they would hopefully make it possible to meet the problems in a somewhat less hysterical way than has sometimes been the case in the recent past.

Another key element in the mood is a growing disbelief in progress, or at least a growing disbelief in the gradual nature of progress. I suppose that one of the basic concepts of our generation has been that reason, hard work, persistence and willingness to compromise here and there are the key elements in gradual progress toward a better world.

In other words, we have tended to think that the solution to even the most difficult problems of our times was to be found in an evolutionary concept whereby the world was gradually improved by incremental steps here and there which brought us steadily and consistently toward our goals. It is a shock to some of us that for a very large number of young people these days there is not this faith and belief in the value or even in the possibility of the gradual evolution toward an ideal. There is instead a growing acceptance of a different concept -- the concept that the appearance of gradual progress is simply a sham and that all real progress in the past has come unevenly, at widely separated points in time, and only as a result of dramatic confrontations and violent clashes in society. The rejection of calm and orderly evolution toward desirable goals is one which is very much out of keeping with the

aspirations of our generation and yet very seriously entertained by large numbers of young people.

Let me use a somewhat different kind of example to illustrate this. When my two sons, both of whom have been graduated from college, were home for the Christmas holidays, a major topic of conversation in the household was what they called The Velikovsky Affair. Velikovsky is the author of the book Worlds in Collision and other writings challenging the accepted theories as to the origins of the solar system and the basic concepts of the evolution of the earth as a part of the solar system. Without going into any detail, one of Velikovsky's conclusions relevant to my point here is that the major changes in the earth, both geological and in terms of the life upon it, have come not by gradual evolution but as the result of cataclysmic occurrences in outer space, such as the passage of a large comet through the magnetic field of the earth and its transformation into the planet Venus. The interesting thing here is not how respectable Velikovsky's theories are (and most scientists have great reservations about this), but why this should be so attractive to young people and why they would defend the Velikovsky theory vehemently and with great passion. Of course in a sense this is a part of the revolt against the establishment, since Velikovsky's theories challenged the scientific establishment to the roots, with the result that he was treated in some cases with very unscientific responses. But more than that, it seemed to fit their mood of distrust in gradual evolution and their sense that nothing would really be changed except by catastrophic means. I do not wish to exaggerate this or to place undue emphasis on it, but it helped me to understand the mood to see the kind of reaction that this departure from evolutionary theory would have among the young. We are probably not fully aware of how much we in our generation have accepted Darwinism as a social theory as well as a scientific theory. The readiness of young people to disavow the possibilities of gradual progress and to reject the thought that progress essentially comes through evolution over time is a key insight into the present attitude of a substantial number of our brightest students.

There is one other important element in the mood that requires comment. This is one which I hope is not too widespread, but there is evidence that it is significant. I would call it a retreat from reason: a glorification of emotions, of the feelings, of spiritual commitment. It is expressed perhaps too simplistically in the observation that these days "college students don't think; they just throb." This is reflected in a tendency to return to barbarism in dress, in speech, in manners and in other ways. This is, in a sense, an affirmation of the importance of feeling against the disappointments and hypocrisies into which they would say we have been led by the reliance on reason and civilized artifice. It is no accident that many young people are increasingly interested in astrology, in magic, and in other manifestations of primitiveness, including art, music and dress. Again, I do not wish to exaggerate the extent of this mood in the young. It is visible in the extreme in only a small number, but we would make a mistake not to realize that many, many young people these days find it more satisfying to trust visceral and emotional responses than to trust what reason tells them. If this were to remain a characteristic of the outlook of these young people, it would be a tragedy for them and for their country and for their world. Again, it is precisely up to the university somehow to restore and to keep bright the importance of reason and the importance of faith in the possibility of man-made progress in ways other than cataclysms, catastrophes, or revolutions. The typical university is far from doing this very well at the present time. Professor Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. put it very well when he said recently:

> "Reason without passion is sterile, but passion without reason is hysterical. I have always supposed that reason and passion must be united in any effective form of public action.
>
> "I can imagine nothing worse for our society than a rejection of reasoned analysis by the young. If we succeed in destroying the discipline of reason, if we make politics a competition in passion, a competition in unreason and violence, the certain outcome will be the defeat of the left."

I suspect most of you would think this is reasonably self-evident. But it is not self-evident to angry young people. And they <u>are</u> angry. This may be what we find it most difficult to grasp. We experience real shock the first time we feel the full impact of that anger, whether in the contorted faces on television screens or in more first-hand ways. What in the world, we are likely to ask ourselves, can they be so disastrously angry about?

I remember a panel discussion I took part in a few months ago in which Jack Vaughn, former Director of the Peace Corps, addressed himself to the question, "What are they angry at?" Vaughn said:

> "First, they are angry at what they consider to be the sham they see everywhere they look: the sham that fighting a war is the way to achieve peace; the sham that life is getting ever better in a country whose great cities are sliding ever more rapidly into dilapidation; the sham that a country that permits 20 million black men and women to be second-class citizens is a country animated by the spirit of liberty and dedicated to the principle of equality; the eternal sham of acting 'in the national interest' with which every pressure group in the land, business and labor and professional and social and political, justifies its maneuvers to cling to ancient privileges or grab new ones.
>
> "And of all the shams young people resent, the ones they obviously resent the most, because they are the most immediate, are those perpetrated by American colleges and universities: the sham that those colleges and universities are independent, inner-directed institutions when, in fact, many of them in many ways are manipulated by both government and business; the sham that they exist for the benefit of their students, when in fact one inviolable principle on which they conduct their affairs is the comfort and profit of their senior faculty members; the sham that they 'prepare young men and women for life' when in fact they are more often than not indifferent to or at odds with the communities that physically surround them; the sham that they provide the best possible education, which is the biggest sham of all."

Our first visceral reaction to such a statement is probably to become angry ourselves. We are apt to respond either with hostility and repression or with a feeling of hopelessness about the whole situation. Both responses are wrong. The first will only worsen the immediate situation, and the second will only make more difficult any ultimate solution.

But we must take a careful second look. We must realize that much that is at the root of the current campus mood cannot be dealt with on the campus itself. The President of Amherst College made this clear in a recent and eloquent public letter to the President of the United States. But there is a great deal that can and must be done on the campuses, and it is our job to try to do it. For a start, I would stress that both the young students and the institutions they are challenging need more than ever the understanding and help of all of us. This will take some doing. It will require a real effort on the part of those who find much that is alien and disturbing in current student opinions to come to the conclusion that there is also much of hope and promise here for their college and for their country.

One of the wisest men I know, John Gardner, spoke last month at the inauguration of the new President of Stanford University. As always, his words are worth hearing:

> "The universities have not, on the whole, been receiving the loving nurture that they need very much at this perilous moment in their history. . . Faculty members have too often regarded the universities as little more than convenient stepping stones or bases in an active career. Students have too often treated the university as a scapegoat for the problems of society, as an available target for the anger that is in them. People interested in solving social problems...have urged the universities to run in all directions at once to cope with the issues of the day. It is time for all of us to rededicate ourselves to the preservation of our great universities. They are vital embodiments of our civilization and vital resources for our future. And like all human institutions, they will not remain vital without loving nurture. Loving nurture includes criticism. The universities must look forward to a decade of vigorous internal reform. But both the criticism and the reform can be accomplished without the savage and destructive conflict that is raging in our best institutions today. . . . I believe that there are grounds for a renewal of confidence."

What is required from us is neither indignant repression nor disgusted withdrawal, but constructive and patient efforts to respond on our several campuses to the legitimate criticisms (and there <u>are</u> legitimate criticisms), and to help restore an atmosphere in which there can be a more fully shared responsibility for the changes that surely must be made. I take it that the way in which this might be made to

happen is high on the agenda of this conference. There could be no more timely or important subject matter for discussion -- not even in this year and month of man's first step on the moon.

Thank you.